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ABSTRACT

Mentoring, or the personal touch, is an essential component in the academic and professional success of minority psychologists. To ensure that minority students receive the personal touch, psychologists can: (1) get to know minority students; (2) encourage minority students to do research early in their academic career; (3) insist that minority students attend state conventions annually and regional conventions whenever possible; (4) be sensitive to cultural, religious, and other differences in students; (5) avoid just focusing on the best minority students, but help other students as well; (6) avoid waiting for students to approach the mentor, rather reach out to them; (7) organize peer mentors on campus; and (8) share personal experiences. Professional organizations can make mentoring minority psychology students a priority by: (1) formulating strategies for increasing minority involvement; (2) encouraging members to deal with this issue; (3) developing mentor training programs; and (4) providing minorities mentoring at each stage of professional development. (JBJ)

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Personal Touch:

Mentoring Minorities in Psychology

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My task this afternoon is to discuss the importance of mentoring for minorities in the field of psychology. Since my colleagues on the dais have already defined mentoring in their presentations, I will not belabor the point here. Suffice it to say that I believe mentoring, or what I like to call the personal touch, is an essential component in the academic and professional success of minority psychologists. In fact, Henry Ellis, in a 1992 article in the American Psychologist identified mentoring as one of the important factors contributing to long-term competence and promoting effectiveness for both students and professionals. According to Ellis, the mentoring relationship should be based on integrity, trust and support, so that students can obtain advice, counseling, and helpful directions in training.

I would take Ellis' statements a step further, particularly as they relate to minority psychologists. One of the most important roles a mentor can play in the life of a minority professional is to help them learn the rules of their particular field. All students, and minority students in particular, not only need a solid understanding of the knowledge base of their field, but also need to understand the intricacies of the society of professionals as well. Because many minority students are the first in their families to attend college or obtain graduate degrees, they may not have "an inside track" if you will, and may not even know that there are rules they don't know! James Blackwell, in his 1981 treatise entitled, Mainstreaming Outsiders describes the production of Black professionals as a process of mainstreaming them into the relevant occupation. He would agree, I believe, that one of the

most important ways to train new professionals is to help them understand how to get ahead in the field of their choosing, how to make the transitions necessary in professional development, and how to network with other professionals as a means of survival.

One reason that minorities in psychology urgently need personal touch mentoring and mainstreaming is that there are so few of us in the field. While psychology remains a very popular undergraduate major, only ten percent of those who receive baccalaureate degrees in our field identify themselves as minorities (Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian-American, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Native American, Inuit, or other non-white racial-ethnic groups). The number of minorities who pursue graduate training in psychology decreases with each advancing degree, so that about five percent of new psychology Ph.D.s are awarded to members of minority groups each year. The number of new minority Ph.D.s in psychology has not changed significantly since the nineteen eighties, although the number of degree recipients overall has increased slightly. I propose that personal touch mentoring from bachelors degree to the completion of the doctorate is one viable way to increase the number of Ph.D.'ed minority psychologists. (See Table 1)

If we are honest, we can admit that there are several reasons why minority students don't pursue graduate degrees in psychology. Certainly, the Ph.D. is an expensive degree to obtain, and most institutions have a limited number of assistantships to offer students. Some students, fearful of tremendous loan debts when

they complete their degrees, may opt for careers with shorter training time and higher pay checks such as business or law. In fact, data reveal that many Black students begin to rule out psychology early in college. Table two identifies the most popular bachelors degrees obtained by students at United Negro College Fund Institutions during the mid to late 1980s. As you can see, the overwhelming majority of student in this sample chose Business Administration as their field of preference, while only four percent selected psychology as a major.

The long-range impact of this shortage is that the number of minorities with psychology doctorates decreases, thereby reducing the number of qualified minorities who can teach, conduct research, or do clinical work in the field. For example, the 1992 Almanac of Higher Education reported that more than 514,000 individuals served as faculty members throughout the Limited States (all fields). Predictably, eighty-eight percent of these individuals where white, four percent were Asian, four percent were Black and less than <u>two</u> percent were Hispanic/Latino. These numbers demonstrate that many professions are suffering from the same Problem: there are too few minorities are available to educate novice professionals. (See Table 3)

Sadly, money is not the only reason we lose minority students in Psychology. The truth is, some students leave the field because we <u>chase</u>, them away! No, most departments don't <u>plan</u> on chasing minorities away, but the outcome is the same students feel it is impossible to infiltrate our profession, and give up trying. Let

me share the experience of a colleague to illustrate my point. This woman, who was a psychology major as an undergraduate, applied for, and was accepted into a certain graduate psychology program. During her first year in graduate school she felt isolated, unwelcome, and even had someone openly question her ability to complete the program successfully. No one seemed to have the time or interest in her that she had become used to as an undergraduate at an HBCU. The end result? She transferred <u>out</u> of the psychology department and into the <u>Sociology</u> department at the same institution. Now, many years later, she is a Ph.D.ed Black female sociologist, who teaches undergraduate <u>sociology</u>. While I am happy for her success in sociology, I am saddened that psychology lost her because of our inability to properly mentor our students. What drew my colleague from social psychology to sociology was the reception she received for her new colleagues. She described them as warm, receptive, attentive and willing to help her infiltrate their professional society. In short, they gave her the personal touch.

What can we do to address these kinds of problems? How can we more effectively mentor our minority students?

First, we must recognize that we have a problem and need help! Mentoring students is no longer an option, it's a <u>requirement</u>. We cannot afford to lose minority students, so we must find ways to keep them in the field. An example from education is provided in Huling-Austin's 1992 article in the Journal of Teacher Education. She states that mentoring skills <u>can</u> and <u>should</u> be taught! She

recommends that mentors understand: (1) the purpose of mentoring; (2) the philosophy of mentoring; (3) the needs of the institutions they serve; and (4) stages of mentee development. She found that mentoring was one of the most important factors in the successful training of novice teachers because it made them feel less isolated, more realistic, encouraged collegiality, and improved their teaching effectiveness. While textbooks and journals certainly provide knowledge, Huling-Austin reminds us that mentors have specialized, domain-specific knowledge that is organized differently from the novice. Mentors convey this to their students by explaining the rules they use to solve professional problems. Mentors also explain those intangible secrets that every profession shares: how to network, how to get into graduate school, who's ego requires stroking in just the right way, who publishes which journal and who their graduate school mentor was, and so on. These issues may be even more relevant to minorities' future success in psychology than what they learn from textbooks in our courses!

Second, we must confront some of our own stereotypical beliefs about minority students. Minority student are just like all other students - they come in a variety of shapes and sizes, come from a variety of backgrounds, and have varying levels of skills and abilities. But unlike White students, minority students may keep their guard up around White instructors for fear that they are perceived as less well prepared then their White counterparts. Like my sociologist colleague and even myself, many minority students have been told from high school through college and

graduate school that they aren't as good as other students. As a doctoral student at Columbia University in New York, I was informed by a Master's level student that it was common knowledge that I was admitted because of my race/gender combination rather than any ability or promise I might demonstrate. This sentiment about minority students, which they are <u>well</u> aware of, may lead them to become isolated from others, avoid asking questions (don't want to appear stupid) and may lead instructors and other students to perceive them as "aloof." The more isolated a student is the harder it will be for them to find a mentor and learn the "rules of the game." Consequently, potential mentors must approach each minority student with an open mind, not with a prejudgment of their personality or ability.

Another stereotype that mentors and minority students must confront is that minority faculty are the only acceptable mentors for minority students. Often, there is <u>one</u> minority faculty member in a department, and they are expected to be the mentor to all minorities and the expert on minority affairs. This may place undo pressure on the faculty member, both practically and emotionally. On the one hand, this minority faculty member may not feel any special affinity toward other minority students, and may want to avoid the appearance of showing favoritism to minorities. On the other hand, this faculty member may feel obligated to work with <u>all</u> minority students, whether they share his or her interests or not. This may cause the faculty member to become overwhelmed, and have less time to do what is necessary to obtain promotion and tenure

(e.g., research, publish). Once this happens, the faculty member will find themselves in need of mentoring and their teaching career in jeopardy! The fact is that personal touch mentoring of minority students must be carried out by all faculty, regardless of there race or ethnicity. Since the vast majority of faculty are white (88%), minority students and white faculty must work together in the mentoring relationship.

What can psychologists do to insure that minority students receive the personal touch? On an individual level, we can all improve our mentoring of minority students in these ways:

1) Get to know them! Know their competences and weaknesses. Address weaknesses early in their academic career. Don't assume students have knowledge they may not have. Tell them they have to perform well academically, and get to know faculty in order to get good references, etc.

2) Encourage minority students to do research early in their academic career. Get them involved in research, not just as data collectors, but let them in on the literature search and review, develop hypotheses and select measures so that they become familiar with the process of research. If you do not have ongoing research of your own, investigate summer programs or involve your students in the research of your colleagues.

3) Insist that minority students attend your State convention annually, and your regional convention

whenever possible. Suggest that departmental money be set aside each year to assist with transportation costs. Help students network during these events to get accustomed to relating to faculty on this level.

4) Be sensitive to cultural, religious, and other differences you may see in your students.

5) Don't just focus on the best minority students, help the other ones as well. Remember, a student may not be a "star" but may ultimately become a competent professional!

6) Don't wait for students to come to you-reach out to them!

7) Organize peer mentors on your campus.

8) Share your own experiences! You don't have to tell your grades - just how you came to be who you are!

Mentoring minority Psychology students must also become a priority for our professional organizations. Psychologists in these organizations can improve the mentoring process in the following ways:

1) Begin formulating strategies for increasing minority involvement, for both as students and professionals. Organizations such as TOPPS, APA, APS, the State/Regional Organizations, and Phi Beta/ Psi Chi all need to develop new approaches to mentoring minority psychologists.

2) Encourage members to deal with this issue.

It's not a minority problem, it's a professional problem!

3) Develop mentor training programs to help psychologists understand how important mentoring is! Continue to encourage professionals to learn about cultural differences so that they can be effective mentors.

4) Provide minorities mentoring at each stage of professional development.

Examples are:

A) High School: Provide realistic appraisal of the field and the specialties available and the educational process.

B) College: Do more than advise about courses to take. Encourage minority students to do research, develop relationships with faculty, attend State and regional conventions, present papers, do poster sessions, and attempt to publish. Help those who do not want to go to graduate school to develop computer, interviewing, and critical thinking skills. Help them understand different routes to the doctorate (e.g., Master's first, employment first). Encourage them to become Student Affiliates of APA!

C) Graduate School: Be available! Expose them to everything and everyone you can. Insist that they

present papers and posters, and have career goals. If they are not sure about their career plans, encourage them to build up their strengths in several ways (do research, teach, write) so that options are available to them. Join APAGS!

D) Novice Professional: don't plan their lives for them - just offer suggestions about directions they can take. Be honest. If you know a particular job will be awful because the program has no funds, office space or secretarial help, tell them! Give them the truth about the politics of our profession. Continue to remain available well after the student has moved on! Help them do research or publish an article together so the student will have the experience and the citation on their Vitae.

In conclusion, the personal touch is very important for all students and novice professionals. Psychologists, both individually and collectively must begin to utilize this technique to effectively mentor minorities in our field.

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Personal Touch Mentoring is:

1. Repeated contacts that help the mentor understand the student's interests, activities, and abilities;
2. Challenging and encouraging the student to maximize their potential;
3. A student mentor relationship that includes honesty, integrity, and trust.

Personal Touch Mentoring Helps the Student to:

1. Become intimately acquainted with the knowledge base of the profession;
2. Understand the "system" of the profession (e.g., its rules, social moves, rituals, etc.)

Table One

Doctoral Degree Recipients in Psychology by Race/Ethnicity for years 1986-87 and 1991-92

Race/Ethnicity	1986-87	1991-92
All Races	3,056 (100%)	3,373 (100%)
White	2,725 (89%)	2,931 (86%)
Black	97 (3.1%)	118 (3,4%)
Hispanic/Latino	71 (2.3%)	102 (3%)
Asian Pacific Islander	51 (1.6%)	58 (1.7%)
American Indian	16 (<1%)	12 (<1%)
Non Residents	97 (3.1%)	152 (4.5%)

(rounded percentages equal approximately 99%)

Sources:

Snyder, T.D. & Hoffman, C.M. (Eds.) (1994). Digest of Educational Statistics, 30th Edition. U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Government Printing Office.

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Table Two

Most Popular Bachelors Degrees obtained by student at United Negro Fund Institutions, 1986-87

Specialization	Number of Student (Percent)
Business Administration	29%
Social Sciences (not including Psychology)	13%
Education	10%
Health Professions	60%
Psychology	40%

Source:

Horton, C.P. & Smith, J.C. (Eds.) (1990). Statistical Record of Black America. Gale Research, Inc. Detroit, MI.

Table Three

Breakdown of U.S. College Faculty
by Race/Ethnicity, 1996

Race/Ethnicity	Number of Faculty	(Percent)
White	455,600	(88.5%)
Black	23,225	(4.5%)
Asian	24,252	(4.7%)
Hispanic/Latino	10,087	(<2.%)
Other	1,498	(<1%)
All Groups	514,662	(100%)

Source:

Almanac of Higher Education, 1992.